

# BUSAM ANALYSIS

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**TURKIYE'S PEACE STRATEGY, PEACE STUDIES, AND  
THE ATATURK INTERNATIONAL PEACE PRIZE AS A  
CONTEMPORARY CASE**

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## **TURKIYE’S PEACE STRATEGY, PEACE STUDIES, AND THE ATATURK INTERNATIONAL PEACE PRIZE AS A CONTEMPORARY CASE**

The awarding of the Atatürk International Peace Prize at the Presidential level in Türkiye to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, on 12 March 2026 signifies not only recognition of Guterres’s contributions to the establishment of international peace and security, but also points to the intellectual and practical ground on which Türkiye has deservedly positioned itself within the literature on international peace, particularly since the Second World War, at both global and regional levels. Beyond Guterres, the initiative to honor leaders and scholars such as Founder President of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Rauf Denktaş, Third President of Azerbaijan Republic Heydar Aliyev, and Prof. Dr. Bernard Lewis, all of whom have contributed to world peace, through the Atatürk International Peace Prize provides a compelling basis and point of departure for assessing the position Türkiye ought to occupy within peace studies.

Within the literature on peace studies, Johan Galtung’s distinction between negative and positive peace is critical for evaluating Türkiye’s position during the Second World War. By remaining outside the war, Türkiye contributed to the preservation of negative peace in the classical sense. Although negative peace corresponds to a relatively weaker position in Galtung’s framework, this contribution should not be interpreted as passive. On the contrary, Türkiye actively produced negative peace through deliberate policy choices.

From a realist perspective, Türkiye’s behavior can be regarded as rational. Despite criticisms directed at Türkiye for aligning with Germany within the framework of the League of Nations, the country remained outside the war, thereby responding to its geopolitical sensitivities and military constraints while demonstrating resilience against the political, economic, and military pressures exerted by great powers, as noted by Frank Weber. During the war, Türkiye pursued a strategy of buying time, managing uncertainty, and keeping its options open until the last moment, thereby minimizing the risk of loss. In doing so, Türkiye not only adapted to the global balance but also exhibited the potential to manage it. Consequently, it stands as a counterexample to the assumption that middle powers function merely as passive balancers.



An analysis grounded in international society and norms necessitates reference to the English School. Since its foundation, Türkiye's foreign policy has been developed in a manner that is both responsive and compliant with international norms. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states, alongside a commitment to limiting warfare, constitutes a key reference point reflecting the principle of sustainability. This positions Türkiye as a regional power that is distant from revisionism, reflective of a status quo orientation, yet not passive. Based on these three approaches, Türkiye's peacefulness may be conceptualized as "normatively grounded realist neutrality."

In the post-Second World War period, a shift from peace to security has increasingly come to the fore. Türkiye's membership in NATO represents a significant transformation in its peace strategy. Within a framework of collective security, the effort to preserve neutrality while maintaining autonomy under alliance dependency has revealed inherent contradictions. Indeed, these tensions have sharpened the question of whether peace or security is more sustainable. The case of Türkiye suggests that long-term neutrality becomes increasingly difficult within a chaotic international system, and that peace strategies often evolve into processes of security construction.

Türkiye's discourse on peace has been continually reproduced through symbolic instruments. The Atatürk International Peace Prize constitutes a significant example in this regard. Guterres's policy orientation, centered on multilateralism, preventive diplomacy, and the management of humanitarian crises, exhibits characteristics that illuminate the pursuit of positive peace. In conjunction with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's principle, "Peace at Home, Peace in the World," which underpins the architecture of Turkish foreign policy, Guterres's approach highlights three shared tenets: the prevention of war is paramount; diplomacy precedes military force; and international cooperation is essential. However, when the issue at stake becomes survival, norm-oriented policies may experience moments of suspension.

The Atatürk International Peace Prize represents not merely an act of recognition, but also a declaration of a normative stance at both national and international levels. Through this award, Türkiye signals, at the presidential level, the universalization of its historical and institutional peace narrative. It demonstrates that peace can be redefined not simply as the absence of war, but as active diplomacy, while emphasizing an ideal orientation. Its continuity further reinforces this normative commitment.



Peace possesses a multi-layered nature, which may be analytically divided into the state level and the level of global governance. The award encompasses both dimensions and draws attention to Türkiye's initiatives addressing each. At the same time, it reflects Türkiye's emphasis on a transition from negative to positive peace.

In conclusion, Türkiye's stance during the Second World War renders visible a strategy often consciously or unconsciously overlooked in peace studies: abstaining from war constitutes an actively managed policy of peace. The Atatürk International Peace Prize represents a contemporary reinterpretation of this historical legacy. What was once a survival-oriented negative peace has evolved into a normatively and institutionally grounded positive peace. Taken together, these dimensions convey a broader message from Türkiye to the field of peace studies: peace is not merely the absence of war, but a process co-produced by strategy, norms, and institutions.